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ABSTRACT

This paper describes one professor's sabbatical leave, when he returned to a third/fourth grade classroom as a teacher. It examines logistical arrangements necessary for success and insights gained. He worked in a Professional Development School (PDS) for 1 year, mentoring a PDS intern, 2 student teachers in the traditional preservice program, and 2 college observers. Arranging for the leave required support from university and school district personnel. The most gratifying part of the work was the opportunity to reuse certain strategies that he taught in university courses and to find them still effective in the classroom. One very effective strategy was the Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Working with preservice teachers from different programs reinforced in him future teachers' need for regular positive feedback on teaching and the importance of regular conferences with preservice teachers. Public school colleagues were a constant source of support and encouragement, which reminded him of the importance of school culture in setting the tone for contacts between adults that can spill into encounters with children. Collegial relationships were crucial to success. The biggest challenge was time management. The paper concludes that regular visits to PDS classrooms provide an important reality check for teacher educators. (SM)

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A Professor Returns to the Classroom in a Professional Development School

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During the 1998-99 school year, I took a year-long sabbatical from my position as Professor in the Division of Early Childhood/Elementary Teacher Education and Professional Development School Coordinator at Emporia State University to return to the elementary classroom as a teacher in a third/fourth combination classroom at William Allen White Elementary School in the Emporia, KS Public Schools. William Allen White Elementary School is one of six Professional Development School sites for the Division of Early Childhood/Elementary Teacher Education at Emporia State University. This paper will summarize the context of the sabbatical leave, the logistical arrangements necessary for such an experience to be successful, insights gained from elementary students, insights gained from Teacher Education students, and insights gained from colleagues. Finally, the biggest challenge I encountered during the sabbatical leave will be discussed.

Context

Since 1993, Emporia State University has provided Professional Development School settings as one of the delivery models for its Teacher Education program for early childhood and elementary education students. During the 1999-2000 school year, four sites are located in the Olathe Unified School District and two sites are located in the Emporia Unified School District. One of the most important factors in selecting Professional Development School sites is the diversity of the student population in the school. William Allen White Elementary School in Emporia has been a Professional Development School site since the 1996-97 school year.

I had last taught in an elementary classroom on a full-time basis during the 1978-79 school year. The return to elementary classroom teaching allowed me to work in one of our Professional

Development Schools for an entire year. In addition to working with third and fourth grade students, I served as a mentor teacher for a Professional Development School intern for 24 weeks, for two student teachers in our traditional program, and for two college observers.

During my sabbatical, I was fortunate to teach in a classroom rich in cultural and economic diversity. My class of twenty-two students included:

--ten third graders and twelve fourth graders

--nine students for whom English was not their first language

--eleven students from single-parent homes

--eight students receiving from special education or other support services

--sixteen children receiving free and reduced price lunches

Logistics

Arrangements for a year-long leave required the cooperation and support of the university and the school district personnel. Preliminary discussions with the department chair, the college dean, and the school principal helped determine the factors to be outlined in a more formal proposal made to the university and the school district.

To facilitate a year-long sabbatical, the university agreed to reduce the workload expected of a half-time university employee to one class each semester which included two sections of our campus methods students. The school district agreed to provide a substitute teacher each Friday afternoon, even when an intern or student teacher might be primarily in charge, to comply with state law and university regulations. We were fortunate that a former Professional Development School intern, serving as a substitute in the district, was available as the regular substitute for the class so that continuity for the students and the adults working in the class was maintained.

In considering whether a year-long leave is appropriate, a university faculty member needs to carefully consider whether their professional agenda for scholarly activity and service can be put on hold. This is particularly important for untenured faculty who may need to fulfill certain requirements to meet tenure expectations. During the spring semester particularly, long-standing relationships with school districts and professional groups for service on accreditation committees and scholarly presentations took me out of the classroom more than planned or intended when planning the sabbatical.

It is also important to carefully negotiate expectations with the building administrator. A particular concern was to what extent the faculty member will be able to attend building and district meetings and inservices. I also negotiated one planning day per school month to be taken as needed with a substitute provided by the district. This was figured into the district's cost for the sabbatical in the proposal which was submitted. While I did not take any of the planning day opportunities that were negotiated, the estimate of this need offset the unexpected absences required for accreditation visits and travel during the spring semester.

Insights from Students

The most gratifying part of my work with the third and fourth grade students was the opportunity to reuse some of the strategies I teach in university courses and to find those strategies to be still effective in the elementary classroom. From the beginning, we worked on building a supportive classroom community through group building activities, use of cooperative learning, and class meetings. These efforts were supported by the school's programs for training students in peer mediation. Reality Therapy, as defined by William Glasser, was a valuable and effective tool in dealing with serious behavior concerns of one of the students in the class.

One of the most effective strategies for working with my class last year was using the Multiple Intelligences theory of Howard Gardner as a planning guide for teaching. Students responded well to learning about multiple intelligences and applying their learning to a careers unit taught in the fall. The preservice teachers and I saw real benefits from planning activities which incorporated different intelligences, particularly visual/spatial activities and bodily/kinesthetic activities which were especially important for the needs of these paricular students.

While working with economically disadvantaged students was not new to me, it was important for me to "learn again" how students from economically disadvantaged homes often feel uncomfortable. From the latest clothing styles worn by some of the students to show and tell items brought by others, some of the students were reminded too often of the things they did not have. It is hard to watch students when class pictures, fund raising prizes, and book orders are distributed when some come from homes without the resources to purchase these items for their children.

I was impressed, as always, by how most parents are genuinely interested in their children's progress and want to be positively involved when given appropriate opportunities to do so by the school. Regular communication with parents, in person and through a weekly newsletter, helped reassure parents that the "new" teacher for their children was, in fact, a caring and qualified professional.

Insights from Teacher Education Students

Working with several different preservice teachers from different programs reinforced for me the need that future teachers have for regular feedback on their teaching which emphasizes the positive things that they are doing. While it is certainly necessary to, from time to time, discuss specific strategies or behaviors which are not appropriate, the students working with me benefited

more from knowing what they should do more of and what their strengths were.

The importance of regular conferences, formal and informal, with preservice teachers was also clear from this experience. By visiting regularly with each of the adults in my classroom, I was able to provide appropriate feedback, answer questions, and pose questions for critical thought and evaluation. Of course, one of the primary benefits of having preservice teachers in the classroom is that they also provide insights and opportunities for self-evaluation by the mentor teacher as well. It is fair to say that I learned as much from the different adults in the classroom last year as I did from the students.

Insights from Colleagues

My public school colleagues were a constant source of support and encouragement throughout the year. I was reminded again of the importance of school culture in setting the tone for contacts between adults that can spill, positively or negatively, into encounters with students. I was surprised at how pleased my colleagues were when I left a thank you note or a note congratulating them on something they were doing.

Collegial relationships in the Professional Development School are crucial to success. At the beginning of the year, I visited with the building administrator about my concerns that too much would be expected of me as a "teacher of teachers". I also asked teachers, during an early faculty meeting, to accept me as one of them and they did so. My work with teachers in the school over a period of ten years helped with acceptance.

I had the opportunity several times to team teach with other faculty in the school. These were exciting times, as I could see the reaction of students to different styles and approaches to teaching.

The Biggest Challenge

The biggest challenge I found during my year in third and fourth grade was time management. There was so much to teach, and so many "interruptions" to the daily schedule. Physical education, music, and art classes are invaluable supplements to the curriculum, but they also take time from the busy day. In addition, my students had a scheduled time daily in the computer lab, weekly times in the library, and a monthly time with the school counselor. During the spring semester, state and district assessments became another drain on an already hectic schedule.

Because time is limited, teacher educators must continue to emphasize the importance of planning, both long term and short term. Prioritization is crucial, but the preservice teacher must also balance academic needs in the curriculum with the needs, interests, and developmental levels of diverse students. What a challenge!

And, into the busy day of the teacher comes the Professional Development School program. As teacher educators, we need to be mindful that the weekly conference, the evaluation forms, even the short conference with the university coordinator when he or she visits take time away from an already full day. We need to support the efforts of the teacher by helping them organize the work of the Professional Development School intern. I found the weekly guide for evaluation conferences (appendix) to be invaluable in helping me get ready, on short notice, to visit with my intern in a systematic way about her progress and learning.

Conclusion

Regular visits to the classrooms of our Professional Development School sites provides an important reality check for teacher educators. Extending those visits to a year-long assignment as

a teacher in the school requires patience, cooperation among agencies, and risk taking. The payoff of the effort is renewed confidence in teaching those preservice teachers who follow my university students from last year. It was certainly worth it!

Appendix

Outcomes for Discussion, Goal Setting, and Assessment (October, November, December)

On-Going Activities				
Plan, teach, and evaluate at least one whole group lesson each week	Have the PDS Coordinator observe at least one lesson each month	Videotape at least one lesson and evaluate your performance	Complete mentor teacher requirements	Plan and teach a short unit (3-5 days) in one or more subjects Complete student teaching requirement for early childhood (if applicable)

Week of	Weekly Benchmarks
October 4	Anticipating and preventing behavior problems Using appropriate, engaging anticipatory sets
October 11	Checking for student understanding while teaching Modifying instruction when students do not understand Keeping students involved and on task
October 18	Using varied strategies for presenting lessons Observe at least one parent-teacher conference
October 25	Assessing student learning during and after teaching
November 1	Planning a short unit (3-5 days in one subject area) Making smooth transitions from one activity to another
November 8	Questioning strategies Using varied resources in lessons Summary conference for this six weeks
November 15	Giving clear, effective directions Meeting the learning needs of all students
November 29 December 6	Complete fall assignment, continue to work on previous outcomes Final evaluation for fall assignment due on or before December 10
December 13	Finals week - Interns are not at the PDS sites

Outcomes for Discussion, Goal Setting, and Assessment (January-March 3)

Week of	Weekly Benchmarks
January 10 January 17	Expectations of the mentor teachers School and classroom rules and procedures Getting acquainted with students Accuracy of observations of students Willingness to accept responsibility Enthusiasm Working with individuals and small groups of students
January 24	Time and stress management Overall adjustment to the class Ability to be proactive and anticipate possible problems Responsibility for planning and teaching lessons
January 31	Beginning teaching one subject area Begin planning thematic unit Developing appropriate plans for needs of students Using effective instructional strategies Managing student behavior February 4 is "midterm" for 8 week assignments - evaluation due
February 7	Time and stress management Continue teaching one subject, expand to two subjects if ready Attention to details Using a variety of strategies and methods for teaching
February 14	Teach two subjects Meeting the needs of individual students Continue planning thematic unit Developing appropriate lesson plans Using effective instructional strategies Managing student behavior
February 21	Responsibility for planning and teaching several subject areas Motivating students Developing appropriate plans Using effective instructional strategies Managing student behavior
February 28	Midterm evaluation (Due on Friday, March 3)